

MONTANA

SHAPED
BY TIME.



AN INTERVIEW WITH MONTANA AUTHOR AND HISTORIAN
HUGH AMBROSE

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

Hugh Ambrose learned a lot from his father, the late historian and best-selling author Stephen Ambrose, who believed that, to understand history, you had to go to where it happened. Now Hugh is an author and historian in his own right. His book, “The Pacific,” chronicles the bloody island battles in World War II and accompanies the HBO series of the same name. He consults on film projects, leads historical tours in Europe and the Pacific, and worked as a researcher for his father. But Helena, Montana, is the place he calls home. Recently, he sat down with veteran Montana journalist Scott McMillion.

Scott McMillion: How did you wind up here?

Hugh Ambrose: It all started when my parents packed up five kids and two dogs and drove from New Orleans to the Little Bighorn Battlefield, known then as Custer’s Last

Stand. My father believed you have to walk the battlefields before you write about the battle. If you don’t, you’re never really going to know what it looked like, felt like, smelled like.

SM: Was that an adventure for you, as a young boy?

HA: We got to be part of a Custer reenactment of the battle and we watched the Sioux come riding over a hill at us at full speed. They looked like they meant business and that charge scared the daylights out of us.

SM: Unlike Custer, you survived, obviously.

HA: The family had a great adventure, with the hiking and camping, meeting the local people. And there was the intellectual journey about this iconic battle that stands out in the history of the United States.



Rimrocks surrounding Billings, MT



Hugh Ambrose, near his home in Helena, MT

SM: So did the adventures continue?

HA: Absolutely. Later, my father took the family on the trail of Lewis and Clark. In Montana, you can float the Missouri River and camp right where Lewis and Clark camped, read the journals and appreciate that they didn’t know what was around the next bend. That was part of his research for his book “Undaunted Courage.”

SM: Modern explorers have it a lot easier these days.

HA: Here’s an example. On Lolo Pass, after the mountains nearly did the expedition in, where they were always one step from disaster, Lewis realized the Northwest Passage, Jefferson’s darling project, didn’t exist. Today, you find signage and parking lots and toilets. It’s easier, but you can still imagine the reality of what they endured, hungry and exhausted.

SM: Any advice for modern explorers?

HA: Pick a slice of history and focus on that. It might be ghost towns and mining. It could be Fort Benton, the last stop for steamboats. You can wander around buffalo jumps and think about having to make a living that way. All that history is all pretty accessible. The Little Bighorn Battlefield is right off I-90. Floating the Missouri isn’t like climbing the Matterhorn. And all of Montana’s Native American tribes have powwows and welcome visitors.

SM: That’s a lot to choose from.

HA: Pursue your own interests. Choose a section of Montana history and follow it, because it gives your trip energy and direction. And if you’re smart, like my folks were, you’ll occasionally find a swimming pool and give your kids a day or two there, where they can get away from historical adventures and just be kids. It matters a lot to family happiness.

View more Montana stories at [VISITMT.COM/MONTANA-STORIES](https://visitmt.com/montana-stories)

PLAN YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE.

LITTLE BIGHORN BATTLEFIELD
NATIONAL MONUMENT

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument memorializes the site of the Battle of the Little Bighorn which took place on June 25-26, 1876 between the United States Seventh Cavalry Regiment led by Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, and the Sioux and Cheyenne under the political and spiritual leadership of Sitting Bull.
Near Billings, MT | visitbillings.com

CHARLES M. RUSSELL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
The Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge plays host to antelope, deer, elk and numerous other species. It’s the third largest refuge in the continental U.S., and allows visitors to view wildlife in its natural habitat.
Fort Peck, MT | missouririver.visitmt.com

**UPPER MISSOURI RIVER BREAKS
INTERPRETIVE CENTER**
The Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center highlights the natural and cultural history of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and the Wild and Scenic Upper Missouri River.
Fort Benton, MT | russell.visitmt.com

MUSEUM OF THE PLAINS INDIANS
The Museum of the Plains Indians has permanent and special exhibits showcasing the historic arts, contemporary works, and social and ceremonial aspects of the tribal people of the Northern Plains.
Browning, MT | glaciermt.com/his



Canoeing the Missouri River



Blackfeet Tepees, Glacier National Park